

Seeking Refuge with Allah from Shayṭān

Allah orders people to seek refuge at the beginning of every recitation, when He says, “*Whenever you recite the Qur’ān, seek refuge with Allah from the cursed Shayṭān.*” (16:98) This command is a recommendation according to the position of the majority for every time of recitation other than the prayer. There is disagreement where the prayer is concerned. An-Naqqāsh reported from ‘Aṭā’ that seeking refuge is mandatory in it. Ibn Sīrīn, Ibrāhīm an-Nakhā’ī and some other people sought refuge in the prayer in every *rak‘at* and treated the command of Allah to seek refuge as applying in every case. Abū Ḥanīfa and ash-Shāfi‘ī sought refuge in the first *rak‘at* of the prayer and considered all the recitation during the prayer to constitute a single act of recitation. Mālik did not think that there was any need to seek refuge in the obligatory prayers but thought it should be done in night prayers in Ramaḍān.

Scholars agree that the formula of seeking refuge is not part of the Qur’ān nor an *āyat* of it. It is the words of the reciter, “*A‘ūdhu bi’llāhi min ash-shayṭāni’r-rajīm*” (‘I seek refuge with Allah from

the Accursed Shayṭān’).” This formula is that on which the majority of scholars agree because it concurs with the expression in the Book of Allah. It is related that Ibn Mas‘ūd said, “I say, ‘I seek refuge with Allah, the All-Hearing, All-Knowing from the accursed Shayṭān.’” The Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said to him, “Ibn Umm ‘Abd, I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shayṭān as Jibrīl read it to me from the Preserved Tablet from the Pen.”

Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah related in their *Sunan* collections that Jubayr ibn Muṭ‘im saw the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, praying. (‘Amr said, “I do not know which prayer it was.”) He said, “Allah is very much greater. Allah is very much greater (three times). Praise be to Allah abundantly. Praise be to Allah abundantly (three times) Glory be to Allah morning and evening (three times). I seek refuge with Allah from Shayṭān and his blowing, spitting and spurring.” Spurring is madness, spitting is poetry and blowing is pride.

Abū Dāwūd also related that Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī said that when the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, rose at night, he would say the *takbīr* and then say, “Glory be to You, O Allah, and by your praise. Blessed is Your Name and exalted are You. There is no god but You.” Then he said, “There is no god but Allah” three times, “Allah is very great” three times, and “I seek refuge with Allah, the All-Hearing, all-Knowing from the Accursed Shayṭān from his spurring, blowing and spitting.” Then he would recite.

Sulaymān ibn Sālim related from Ibn al-Qāsim that the refuge formula is: “I seek refuge with Allah, the Immense from the Accursed Shayṭān. Allah is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing. In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, Most Merciful.” Ibn ‘Aṭiyya stated, “Those who recite often change the attribute of the Name of Allah and that of the other, as when one says ‘I seek refuge with Allah the Glorious from the rebellious Shayṭān,’ and the like. I do not say that this is a good innovation nor that it is not permitted.”

Al-Mahdawī said, “The reciters agree about reciting the refuge formula at the beginning of the *Fātiḥa* except for Ḥamza who does

it silently. As-Suddī related that the people of Madina used to begin recitation with the *basmala*. As-Samarqandī related from some of the commentators that seeking refuge is an obligation. When the reciter forgets it and then remembers at some point in his recitation, he stops and seeks refuge and then begins from the beginning again. One of them said that he seeks refuge and then returns to where he stopped. The first is the position of the authorities of the Ḥijāz and Iraq and the second is that of the authorities of Syria and Egypt.

Az-Zahrāwī said, “The *āyat* was revealed about the prayer, and it was recommended to seek refuge outside the prayer, but it is not an obligation.” Another said, “It was an obligation only for the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and we emulate him.”

It is related from Abū Hurayra that the refuge formula should be recited after recitation. Dā’ūd said that. Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī said, “Not knowing the correct way led people to say that when the reciter finishes reciting the Qur’ān, he should seek refuge with Allah from the Accursed Shayṭān.” Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to seek refuge in the prayer before the recitation. This is a confirmed text.

If it is asked, “What is the benefit of seeking refuge from the Accursed Shayṭān at the time of recitation?” the reply is that the benefit lies in obeying the command. The only benefit of prescribed matters lies in obeying them if they are commands or avoiding them if they are prohibitions. It is said that its benefit is to obey the command to seek refuge from the whispering of Shayṭān in recitation as Allah says, “*We did not send any Messenger or any Prophet before you without Shayṭān insinuating something into his recitation while he was reciting.*” (22:52).

Ibn al-‘Arabī said, “Very strange is what we find of the words of Mālik in the Collection regarding the *tafsīr* of this *āyat*, ‘*Whenever you recite the Qur’ān, seek refuge with Allah from the cursed Shayṭān*’ (16:98) when he says, ‘That is after the recitation of the Umm al-Qur’ān for the one who recites in the prayer.’ This

position has no effect and investigation does not support it. If it is as some people say about the seeking refuge being after the recitation, it specifies that that is after the *Fātiḥa* in the prayer. That is a vast claim and does not resemble the basic principle or understanding of Mālik. Allah best knows the secret of this transmission.”

Regarding the excellence of seeking refuge, Muslim related that Sulaymān ibn Ṣurad said, “Two men were quarrelling in the presence of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. One of them became angry and his face turned red and his veins stood out. The Prophet looked at him and said, ‘I know a statement which, if you say it, will remove what you feel: “I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shayṭān.”’ A man who had heard the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, went to the man and said, ‘Do you know what the Messenger of Allah said? He said, “I know a statement which, if you say it, will remove what you feel: I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shayṭān.”’ The man said to him, ‘Do you think I am mad?’” (al-Bukhārī)

Muslim reported that ‘Uthmān ibn Abī’l-‘Āṣ said, “I went to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and said, ‘Messenger of Allah, Shayṭān comes between me and my prayer and recitation and confuses me.’ He said, “That is a shayṭān called Khinzab. When you feel that, seek refuge in Allah from him and spit to your left three times.’ I did that and Allah removed it from me.”

Abū Dāwūd reported that Ibn ‘Umar said, “When the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, travelled, and night was coming he said, ‘O earth, my Lord and your Lord is Allah. I seek refuge with Allah from your evil and the evil of what He creates in you, from the evil of what crawls on you, from the lion and the black scorpion, from snakes and scorpions and the dwellers of the land, and the parent and what he begets.’”

Khawla bint Ḥakīm reported that she heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, “If anyone makes camp and then says, ‘I seek refuge with the complete words

of Allah from the evil of what He created,' he will not be harmed by anything until he sets out again." (*Muwattā'*, Muslim and at-Tirmidhī)

The refuge formula (*isti'ādha*) in Arabic is seeking protection in something so that it will guard a person against what he dislikes.

The name "Shayṭān" comes from a root which means to be far from good. *Shaṭūn* is a deep well. *Shaṭan* is a rope. It is called that because its ends are from far from one other. The Arabs describe a refractory horse as a shayṭān. Shayṭān himself is called that because he is far from the truth and is rebellious; and the word is used for every rebellious one among the jinn and animals. It is said that "*shayṭān*" is derived from *shāṭa* which is a word used for someone who is destroyed or burned. *Ar-rajīm* (accursed) means to be far from good and humiliated. Its root means "stoning". "Stoning" is a metaphor for killing, cursing, exile and abuse.

It is reported from 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, "I saw the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, at Ṣafā, facing an individual in the form of an elephant whom he was cursing. I asked, 'Who are you cursing, Messenger of Allah?' He replied, 'This is the accursed Shayṭān.' I said, 'Enemy of Allah, by Allah, I will kill you and relieve the Community of you!' He said, 'This is not my repayment from you.' I asked, 'And what is your repayment from me, enemy of Allah?' He said, 'By Allah, no one will hate you at all unless I had a share of him with his father in his mother's womb.'"